FROM AFRO-CUBANS TO BLACK CUBANS. AFRICANITY AND SKIN COLOR IN THE CUBAN SOCIAL IMAGINARY

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The political imperative that in the Citizens Conference against Racism, Xenophobia, Intolerance and Racial Discrimination[2], held in 2000 in Chile, the term "afro-descendant" was incorporated into the official international vocabulary, in turn founded a controversy – not resolved until today – on the relevance of such term.

For those who needed a category of identification-communication from and among the African Diaspora in the Americas, a way to exalt and recognize a common history of uprooting and domination, the claim of the afro prefix was a way to legitimize the processes of identity construction that the Haitian revolution inaugurated. For others, emotionally connected with an African history that found its emancipatory course on these shores of the Atlantic, the proposal came too late because Africa, which was already muscle and blood, did not need to become skin.

In one way or another, the discussion about the correctness of putting our ethnic ancestry before our national origin, suggests considering how those identities were constructed and in which contributions of African cultures are recognized today the Cuban blacks, most of whom are accustomed to assume themselves as blacks only in the background. Thus, the reluctance towards the cultural and political use of the word "Afro-Cuban" could be interpreted as a march opposed to the emerging political discourse, or a petulant trip back from the imagined community to which many others go.

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The reflection we propose presupposes a review of history, because the starting point was the same for everyone. Wars, hunts, traps and ambushes preceded the barter and the sale, the inhuman storage in the factories of the coast, the awful embarkation, in the middle of the waves, and the terror of people who had never seen the sea. The fears multiplied with the transfer to another warehouse – the slave ship – always moving despite the dizziness, vomiting, deaths and the splashing of each one on their excrescences and those of others. What happened, probably very rarely was told spontaneously, because human beings find it difficult to remember the horror. Today we can only imagine what happened through the novels of Manuel Zapata Olivella, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker or Roberto Burgos Cantor.

As pointed out by Fernando Ortiz:

> The slavers, when they brought to the Indies their costly pieces of ebony, could not take away the sap that flowed in them, they could not bring from their slaves only their bodies and not their spirits. The Africans brought with them their culture and tried in their cruel longing to maintain it and transmit it to their children. "Among the folk treasure that belonged to them were the stories, fables, legends, rhapsodies, and songs that contained the deeds of their ancestors, the mythologies of their beliefs, the cosmogonies of their philosophers, the rites of their cults, the spells of their sorcerers and the stories with which black mothers entertained their children and instilled in them the teachings and advice of popular knowledge (Cairo 2002).

In his analysis on the construction of the Creole identity, as an early phase of the process of national formation, the historian Eduardo Torres Cuevas points out that in Cuba, as in the rest of the Caribbean, the new community had to integrate multiple origins:

> From the muzzle, to the Creole, to the Cuban; from Spanish, to Creole, to Cuban; from Chinese, to Creole, to Cuban. The process is always the same and the result, a new social archetype that is not defined by any ethnic group – and takes from all –; that interrelates dissimilar elements, but always altering its original content to originate a new quality that is not found in any of its previous components, which is the result of a synthesis that improves, not a product that keeps the ingredients separated (Torres Cuevas 2006, I 16).

Seen in a long-term perspective, such was the way that the process went. However, it is important not to forget that during the colonial period, Creoles of African origin were designated as Afro-Cubans with much greater

frequency than they were recognized as black Creoles, because it was interesting for whites born on the island to monopolize that condition. The members of the white strata thought "the Creole" as a social, economic and political category that would result, with the passage of time, as a social name (Le Riverend and Venegas 2005, 10-11). Meanwhile, the black population, even with free status, "[...] was still defined by its African heritage and was associated with slavery. Racial identity became more and more the primary, though not the only, factor in the definition of hierarchy in Cuban society" (Childs 2012, 125).

Since then, the descendants of Africans are part of that "otherness" built with intent and treachery by the effective tools of power that dominated us and invented the words that describe and classify us, definitions and categories that, as explained by the intellectual and Venezuelan activist Jesús "Chucho" García, always look for the way to extend themselves:

> [...] We, naively, out of ignorance or simply out of resignation, have in most cases conformed to the view of the colonizer and neo-colonizer, from any platform: the academy, the Church, the inorganic intelligentsia, the State, politics, and other spaces that legitimize their discursive constructions of domination based on racism and racial discrimination (García 2015, 213).

During the colonial period, the daily use of the Afro-Cuban word served not only to designate those born in Cuba who had certain physiognomies; many times it was enough to codify an ignoble condition, as it referred to a culture considered primitive, marginalized and delinquent. At the dawn of the twentieth century, criminal anthropology still sought among Afro-Cubans the

> [...] criminal, continuous scammer, thief often, rapist and murderer in some cases, desecrator of graves when possible. Lustful pf the wildest sexual corruption, concubinary, polygamous, lascivious in the practices of the cult and outside them and fomenting the prostitution of others (Quiza 1998, 233).

Numerous testimonies of formerly enslaved people gave accounts, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, of the self-taught strategies of the oppressed against a power that forbade them to learn to read and write. Hence, education and culture have been the fundamental routes of social ascension for the descendants of Africans. In nineteenth-century Cuba, the Friends of the Country Society[3] – an institution founded at the end of the

3 *Sociedad Amigos del País.*

eighteenth century by the enlightened elites with purposes of instruction and cultural advancement – outlawed in 1816, the practice that poor children of different sexes and colors shared the classroom and discouraged free people of color from working as teachers, even though the exercise of the profession was "tolerated" for children of similar racial status.

By 1861, the proportion of black girls and boys enrolled in primary education had fallen from 25% of enrollment to 3.7% (García Agüero 1937, 175). However, the census statistics of the first Cuban post-colonial decade[4] reported that between 1899 and 1907, the black literates over 10 years old grew from 24% to 45%, seven percentage points above the whites of similar population segment; and adolescents between 10 and 14 who knew how to read and write almost equaled the 70% reached by their white peers[5]. Although many objections can be made about the scope and degrees of opportunities for social advancement offered with the advent of the republic, it is indisputable that "[...] Afro-Cubans took advantage of them. In fact, their schooling rates in the 1920s were slightly higher than those of whites. According to census data, in 1907 and 1919, the proportions of black/white school attendance were 1.04 and 1.03, respectively" (de la Fuente 2014, 184).

Since the end of the first war of Cuban independence (1868-1878), which did not bring with it the political independence of the island or the abolition of slavery, blacks and mulattoes had fought great battles for their civil rights. Some of their most important victories were: the permission of enrollment in secondary schools, professional schools and the university (1878); the end of the separation by colors in the parochial books (1881); access to parks, gardens and walks (1882); the possibility of occupying first-class carriages on trains (1887); and the faculty to use the treatment of "don" and "doña" (1893).

4 The second war of liberation against Spain undertaken by the Cubans in the nineteenth century ended in 1898, after three years of bloody confrontations, with the intervention in the struggle of the United States Army and the signing of a peace agreement – the Treaty of Paris – from which the representatives of the Cuban Liberation Army were excluded. The US government functioned as an intervening authority between 1899 and 1902. During that period, a constituent assembly drafted the first Cuban constitutional text, elections were called and the republic was formally established on May 20, 1902. The constitution had, however, a clause that allowed the United States to intervene militarily on the island if the government of that country considered that their interests were affected in any way. Until 1934 the Cuban republic functioned more like a protectorate.

5 See: *Report on the Census of Cuba, 1899*. Office Director Census of Cuba. War Department; and *Censo de la República de Cuba 1907*, Oficina del Censo de los Estados Unidos, Washington, 1908.

With the enactment in 1878 of a Law of Associations, Cuban blacks and mulattoes agreed to a new type of sociability, which in the popular strata strengthened solidarity networks, maintained the re-workings of African culture as a reason and social glue, at the same time that gave an increasingly important role to the construction of citizenship. Already in the twentieth century, the descendants of Africans of greater solvency constituted societies and clubs in which the economic status and, in some cases, the tonality of the skin, influenced the possibilities of access to one or another institution.

It is understandable that for many black Cubans there were distinctive behaviors of civility and progress. Such behaviors were: expressing themselves correctly in a language that their grandparents failed to master; imitating European etiquette and customs; avoiding the strident closeness of the drum and the debauchery of their dances; smoothing their hairs; demonizing regions of African substrate and founding societies of instruction and mutual aid where there was no space for reminiscences of such kind.

However, it would greatly benefit our analysis not mechanically equating such cultural responses with the mimicry inherent in the colonized, with the behavioral expression of those who accept and revere the dominant culture, although this is also the one that inferiorizes and oppresses. Where there are no dialogues or exchanges, imitation is self-recognition of inferiority, but it is advisable to bear in mind that mimicry is also the first stage of any process of cultural reconstruction.

To Cuba, the Africans arrived by tens of thousands to operate plantations and *haciendas* without any other heritage than their bodies, their culture and their historical memory. When the younger and more dynamic part of the island society struggled to acquire economic autonomy, political freedom and their own cultural profile. It is often forgotten that many of them were children and teenagers, if we stick to the statistics compiled and reviewed by scholars of the transatlantic trade[6]. Much more flexible and open to the dialogues and exchanges forced by coexistence, the enslaved arrived massively at Cuba in 1808 – when England abolished slavery and dedicated itself to harass and prosecute trafficking – they could not do anything but to amalgamate, to merge, to bring their African essences to a totally new bodily, psychological and cultural nature.

6 Paul E. Lovejoy ("Los niños del Atlántico". Rina Cáceres Gómez (Ed.): *Del olvido a la memoria: África en tiempos de la esclavitud*. Oficina Regional de la UNESCO para Centroamérica y Panamá, San José, 2008, p. 50), assures that on that cited date 2 340 088 enslaved landed on the coasts of America, of which 1 017 013 were children, 43.46%. To do this, he cites statistics from David Eltis, Stephen Behrendt, David Richardson, and Manolo Florentino. "The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database", revised version, 2007.

Used as a substantive sometimes denigrating, the word "Afro-Cuban" became an adjective as a result of an integration that threaded love, work and tremendous struggles of the descendants of Africans to stop being a prolongation of a past ethnos transplanted to the Americas and authenticate themselves as Cubans and black Cubans.

Love gave black women an irreplaceable place. They nursed and raised the children of their masters and with them were forging strange affinities; they transmitted fables, legends and rhythmic African cells in the form of lullabies; they created new phonetic molds for the Castilian language and implanted in children – with their particular ways of preparing food –, non-European roots of taste. Above all things, black women, enslaved or free, offered selfless love, complicity and excessive consent.

The works made black women and men essential. Their arms cut the cane and extracted its juices; they sowed and harvested coffee; they took care of the animals; they built forts, mansions and cultural centers; they moved carriages, distributed water and cleared roads; they showed new ways of making and enjoying music, of dressing and adorning the body. Wherever the social practices expressed the new and different constitution of the American colonies, there they were, making the projects, the needs and the desires feasible. It is the indelible imprint of the presumably dominated that created Afro-Cuban religions, Afro-Colombian music, Afro-Brazilian cuisine, Afro-Uruguayan dances and all social practices whose prefixes lost part of their importance, according to those acquired national credentials.

In the case of Cuba, this construction of the national was strengthened by the participation of black people in politics, whose most radical expressions were the maroon palenques, the slave uprisings and the massive incorporation into a popular army that, in its last war, granted ranks of general to 17 descendants of Africans[7].

Other silent but bitter battles – also political, as they confronted the system of colonial domination – freed the black women and men of Cuba to have family, homeland and citizen rights. Turning social practice into a source of law, opening paths to freedom through coarctation and progressive

7 The Cuban historian Francisco Pérez Guzmán in his book *Radiografía del Ejército Libertador* (Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, La Habana, 2005), identified the following officers: with the rank of Major General: Antonio Maceo Grajales, José Maceo Grajales, Agustín Cebreco Sánchez, Adolfo *Flor* Crombet Tejera, Pedro Díaz Molina, José Guillermo Moncada y Jesús Sablón Moreno, *Rabí;* with General of Division rank: Florencio Salcedo Torres, José González Planas, Juan Eligio Ducasse Reeve y Quintín Bandera Betancourt; and as Brigade Generals: Juan Pablo Cebreco Sánchez, Dionisio Gil de la Rosa (Dominican by birth), Alfonso Goulet Goulet, Prudencio Martínez Echeverría, Vidal Ducasse Reeve y Silverio Sánchez Figueras.

liberation strategies through different agreements; learning, against all odds, to read and write; cultivating the trades on which the functioning of colonial society depended; resolving, through the councils of the nation, the social cohesion fragmented by slavery and taking advantage of every loophole of freedom once the abolition was decreed, prepared them to participate in the republican debut.

I think I understand Michel Zeuske (2003, I 76) when he says "Africa is a cultural invention of America". Thousands of African-Americans left after that dream, especially from the United States, Brazil and several Caribbean islands. The return – which reached its highest volumes between 1835 and 1842, because of the input of those intercepted at sea and then emancipated – chose as entry points Lagos, Porto-Novo and other ports that today belong to western Nigeria and the republics of Benin, Togo and Ghana (Matory 2015, 61-62). With the return to a land that was a project but also a myth, an era of exchanges between Africa and America began that have not yet been sufficiently studied, although in the long run such dialogues were influential in productive practices, trade, religions, music, visual arts and social thought on both continents.

Liberia, the colony founded in 1822 and in which the utopia of the return was attempted, received tens of thousands of African-Americans between the mid-nineteenth century and the first decade of the next century. However, the Americo-Liberians, convinced of the superiority conferred by their Western culture, use of the English language and adherence to the Christian faith, exercised cultural hegemony over indigenous Africans, actively promoted Christianity and, aware of their privileged position , they maintained

> [...] a strict political control over Liberia, limiting the political participation even of educated indigenous Africans. Only very few of them were granted the right to vote on an equal footing with the Americo-Liberians (although these themselves could be illiterate and poor) (Akpan 1987, VII 279).

With the implantation of the western rationality in which they were educated, the emigrants to Liberia reconstituted the hegemonic pattern of the old metropolis. The Africa of nostalgia, dreams and plans of return, of the semi-human and frolicsome orishas, was almost never there; and not in the Americas either, despite the efforts of the cultural anthropology of the 20th century, committed to tracking African "residues" and "survivals" among us, without understanding that new cultures were being constructed

that interpreted, questioned and dialectically denied cultural multiplicities from Africa. Life continued on both sides of the Atlantic, testing utopia and myth with different modalities of colonization, evangelization, colonial domination, integration to transnational capitalism and openness to new cultural confrontations.

In the case of Cuba, the nationalist ideology and the ideal of equality and fraternity that turned a mass of insurgents composed mainly of peasants and descendants of Africans, into a popular army capable of eroding even the Spanish professional army, were ancillary elements of the republic proclaimed in 1902. The descendants of Africans conquered, with their sweat and blood, the status of citizens. Perhaps that is why the black Creole never thought about being Cuban, as Fernando Ortiz highlighted at the time (Suárez 1996, 33).

In the cultural sphere, the new republican order had to materialize the modernizing projects of the enlightened elites, more aware of the economic, scientific, and technical achievements of the young American empire than of the anguished struggle of Spanish liberalism or the stormy rearrangements of the South American republics, while the frustration of the ideal of racial equality formed a new stage of struggle for Cuban blacks and mestizos.

Despite of the advances experienced on the basis of great personal efforts and the activation of societal and family networks, in the 1920s, the sufficient frustrations, political practices and social intersections necessary to contribute to change had accumulated; transformation that would be catalyzed by the crisis of the bourgeois civilizational paradigm that followed the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, a situation that I would like to characterize according to an article by the intellectual Gustavo Urrutia entitled "Hora afrocubana" (Afro Cuban Hour):

> [...] when the Great War shattered the soul of the western world, the black came again to lend to that same world the help of their robust spiritual personality, this time by the influence of their art as a psychological reagent of the white peoples, who fought against each other with fierce savagery annihilating men, cultures, and spiritual values. To recover from the psychological core, these peoples needed a very strong injection of 'cultured savagery'. This generous injection of 'wild culture' was lavished by the Negro, who unexpectedly shed the treasure of his art in the exhausted realm of Western civilization, the dynamic or eloquent essences of their dances, their choirs, their drums, their literature, their sculpture, their laughter, that magical black laugh ... solvent of all neurasthenic embarrassment (Urrutia 1935, 4).

In Cuba, the third decade of the twentieth century was a temporary scene of fierce popular struggles, led by workers and students uprising against

the oppression of the transnational Yankees and their butlers in the courtyard, contradictions that reached their climax during the so-called Revolution of the 1930s[8]. In the cultural arena there was also a bitter confrontation, between the Hispanic heritage committed to maintaining their hegemony and the new forms and cultural manifestations of a society that was beginning to assume its African identity and confront the racism inherent in the pan-Hispanic consciousness that the former colonial empire tried to restore.

In several of our countries – Cuba, Brazil, Argentina and Mexico, to name a few examples – many of the nationalist debates of the time were fought around the symbolic and factual construction of the autochthonous culture. Such discussions showed certain similarities in Cuba and Brazil as societies deeply marked by the rigors and excesses of the "Second Slavery". In this regard, the Argentine intellectual Octavio di Leo (2001, 49) states: "During the busy decade of '30, the 'racial issue' came to occupy the center of intellectual debate in Brazil", a criterion that could well be applied to Cuba.

By then, the island was the scene of a cultural movement of ephemeral and contradictory nature, but essential as a substrate and intermediate station in the process of Cuban national construction: afrocubanism, current on which Alejo Carpentier wrote in 1946:

> Thus the Afro-Cuban tendency was born, which for more than ten years would feed poems, novels, folkloric and sociological studies. Trend that, in many cases, only reached the superficial and peripheral, 'the black under the drunk palm trees of the sun', but that was a necessary step to better understand certain poetic, musical, ethnic and social factors, which had helped to give a physiognomy characteristic of the Creole (Carpentier 2012, 216).

The found points of view of artists and intellectuals of the time about the transcendence of the Hispanic and African contributions to the Cuban culture, are appreciated in all their richness in the controversies generated by the introduction of African rhythmic cells and musical instruments of similar origin in musical groups of symphonic format – with more or less direct references to the musical innovations of Amadeo Roldán and Alejandro García Caturla –, or in the pejorative and conservative critiques that were the subject

8 Popular insurrection gestated since the current ruler, Gerardo Machado Morales, created in 1928 an illegitimate mechanism to extend the executive and legislative powers of the Cuban State until 1935. Although there was no unification of the revolutionary forces or any of the leaders excelled enough to lead the popular rebellion, the conjunction of collective actions of resistance and protest carried out on the streets by workers, students and the people in general, especially since the end of 1932, succeeded in overthrowing the tyranny on August 12th, 1933.

of *Motivos de son y Sóngoro cosongo*, the first two poems by Nicolás Guillen in which the rebel tongue emulated the drum and replaced Africa on its throne.

At the height of the thirties, many of the black and mestizo intellectuals no longer used the Afro-Cuban word and preferred – like Nicolás Guillén, Ángel César Pinto and Alberto Arredondo – to allude to black and black Cubans, highlighting the qualities, efforts and conditions that had allowed a tiny but significant minority to emulate the results of the enlightened whites. This is what Nicolás Guillén reminded the journalist Raimundo Menocal, in the controversy unleashed on the subject of an article in which the publicist tried to argue the inferiority of black people:

> What means of instruction did the black slave have? Which did the free black have? But every time they found them, they gave types like Manzano, Plácido, White, Brindis de Salas, the Maceo, Morúa, Juan Gualberto Gómez, in the colony, and is already giving, in the Republic, more and more purified specimens of intelligence, culture and love of work and progress (Guillén 2002, I 67).

At that time, many understood that Africans and their descendants not only had a decisive participation in the economic functioning of Cuban colonial society; They were also irreplaceable for the family and the home, essential for the construction of a new cultural plot and protagonists without discussion of the anticolonial deeds of the Cuban people.

It was these multiple influences, exercised on a community in the process of constituting its social fabric, that produced the unwanted but irreversible "Africanization" of Cuban culture. That history and its circumstances marked the cultural debates of the thirties and forties, period in which a human profile definitively forges in Cuba, which, being one and many at the same time, would express one of its most consistent nationalist discourses through vernacular cultural expressions.

After 1959, the radical social measures of the Cuban Revolution[9] were accompanied by an emancipatory and anticolonial cultural policy that

9 Between 1959 and 1961 took place the dismantling of the way of life and the institutionality that characterized the bourgeois republic neocolonial Cuban. The Law of Agrarian Reform, distributed the land that was in the hands of national and foreign capitalists, eliminated the payment of rents that affected 85% of the peasants and increased their purchasing power. In March of 1959 the reduction of the telephone rates was executed and a few days later they were reduced between 30% and 50%. In August, electricity rates were reduced with an economic impact similar to that caused by the decrease, on the same date, of the prices of a wide range of medicines. Between 1959 and 1961, tens of thousands of jobs were generated and workers' wages grew between 30% and 40%. In December 1961, the Literacy Campaign concluded, during which more than 700,000 people learned to read and write.

stimulated the emergence and development of dozens of musical and dance groups especially dedicated to the rescue, conservation and enrichment of the undervalued African contributions, while museums and diverse cultural institutions disseminated material and spiritual expressions of similar origin, complemented by the contributions of relevant scientific institutions, hundreds of social researchers and a significant number of publishing houses (de la Hoz 2006).

Cuba was the penultimate country of the Americas to abolish slavery, in 1886, and one of the territories with the greatest African demographic until the mid-nineteenth century. This explains the legitimizing potential of a political practice that from 1959 built bridges to African cultures and the countercultures embodied in the Black Panthers and Malcolm X. Its assumed Africanity was strengthened, in addition, with the sustained exchanges with the republics emerged from the process of decolonization, in which hundreds of thousands of Cubans have saved lives, literate, fought and built homes and infrastructure.

Living, working and fighting in Sub-Saharan lands allowed hundreds of thousands of Cubans to replace mythological Africa with the real one, with all its complexities and contradictions. This formidable impact reduced legitimacy and evidenced, with the passage of time, the incongruity of other state policies, such as the stigmatization of religions of African substratum and the conversion of "scientific atheism" into the philosophical support of the educational system and partisan militancy in Cuba. The resolution that the Fourth Congress of the Communist Party adopted in October 1991[10], contributed to finalize what the Dominican friar Frei Betto described as "a confessional party, insofar as it is an atheist party that proclaims the non-existence of God" (Betto 1985, 227).

It is probably true that the majority of Cubans are not prepared, psychologically or culturally, to understand the real Africa. I valued the enormous influence that the Europeanizing "Western" tradition has on the perceptions and instinctive responses of Cubans during my first and only visit to an African country – Ghana – as culturally immeasurable as any other of that continent. However, these Westernized preventions are not an obstacle for the natives of the island, no matter how visible or not the blackness of

10 The Cuban party conclave, in its *Resolución sobre los Estatutos del Partido Comunista* ratified its Marti, Marxist and Leninist ideological line, but put an end to the exclusion of the believers when, among the modifications that had to be adopted immediately, it decided: "to suppress the practice of the processes of growth for the Party any interpretation of the current statutes that entails denying a vanguard revolutionary, because of his religious beliefs, the right to aspire to be admitted to the Party"

their skin, to consider Africa an emotional reference, source of inspiration and idealized mortar that makes them feel part of something transcendent in time and space.

Due to the history I have studied and lived, I identify fully with that majority of women and men who feel, above all, Cubans and flaunt an Africanity that doesn't require prefixes. Personally, I feel first Cuban and then black, and not the other way around, because I was born and lived in revolutionary Cuba, as American historian and activist Lisa Brock signified to me some time ago. But I cannot and I must not deny that new and proud way that some compatriots have to consider themselves "Afro-Cuban". I assume it more as a way of being than as an intrinsic quality, persuaded that the transnationality founded by the slave trade begins to reverse congenital inferiority and confronts with its own values the discourse, always colonial and colonizing, of Western rationality.

Some time ago, in response to a questionnaire I sent to several friends, one of them answered:

> [...] an Afro-Cuban is the black and I add, mulatto or white who identifies with the Afro-Cuban, the man or woman who has full consciousness and is proud of their African ancestors, which is defined as such to underline their African heritage and that they no longer allows themselves to be defined as a human being based on Eurocentric prejudices [...].[11]

I was satisfied with a definition that integrates us into the struggles that millions of women and men, descendants of Africans, have fought for almost half a millennium, always in disadvantageous conditions, without another shield or sword than their cultures and their historical memory. For this reason, I believe that the time has come to denounce suspicions and technicalities: let us be Afro-Cuban as long as it is necessary, if it brings strength and light to the effort to make Cuba a better country.

11 Exchange of mail of the author with researcher and social activist Tomás Fernández Robaina.

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ABSTRACT

The present research intends to clarify the late African identity all across Latin America and, more specifically, in Cuba. With a historical background, the paper aims to recover the creole identity formation, thus, discovering the genesis of the "Afrocuban" current term. In addition, colonial Cuban history is filled with social structure of racism and segregation to the so-called Afrocubans. Even after independence in the late 1890s the racist social structure prevailed for decades – a heritage from the slavery period that lasted for centuries in the Island. The African identity during the 20th century, however, grew in importance in Cuba as the number of Afrodescendant politicians grew as well in the parliament. But, in sum, the article has its core goal in finding out the cultural identity of the Cuban people, if they identify themselves as only Cubans, or Afrocubans, our, perhaps, first as Cuban then as Afrodescendants, or even the opposite.

KEYWORDS

Afrocuban; creole identity; parallel culture; segregation; identity construction.

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